

In Nomine Jesu

Prayer Upon Entering Church: Stir up our hearts, O Lord, to make ready the way of Your only-begotten Son that at His Second Coming we may worship Him in purity; who lives and reigns with You and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. Amen.

The Text

Luke 3:1-6

In the fifteenth year of the reign of Tiberius Caesar, Pontius Pilate being governor of Judea, and Herod being tetrarch of Galilee, and his brother Philip tetrarch of the region of Ituraea and Trachonitis, and Lysanias tetrarch of Abilene, ²during the high priesthood of Annas and Caiaphas, the word of God came to John the son of Zechariah in the wilderness. ³And he went into all the region around the Jordan, proclaiming a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins. ⁴As it is written in the book of the words of Isaiah the prophet,

"The voice of one crying in the wilderness:
Prepare the way of the Lord,
make his paths straight.

⁵Every valley shall be filled,
and every mountain and hill shall be made low,
and the crooked shall become straight,
and the rough places shall become level ways,

⁶and all flesh shall see the salvation of God."

The Sermon

When I turn my computer on in the morning, I'm greeted with headline news – courtesy of yahoo. When I pick up the pages of the newspaper – there are again these large print headlines – screaming out at me. As I drive – the radio repeats the same information – along with traffic and weather bulletins.

When I watch TV – many of the same headlines will once again clamor for my attention. News – news – news. Everywhere I look – there are headlines – bulletins – banners – and pop-up windows. With no real effort to speak of – I can learn about politicians – rock stars – movie stars – and business moguls.

A list of celebrity birthdays – “This Day In History” – soon to be released cinematic features – movie trailers – are **all** readily available. **But – but** – if I choose to live – as a political junkie – a rock groupie – or a sports fanatic – my actual life loses significance.

My world – will increasingly mirror – **their** world. I will dress like them – wear clothes bearing their name – and repeat their jokes and stories. I will mouth **their** opinions – on food – sex – politics – religion – and relationships. My own self – will wither in doing so – and eventually **die**.

Now – the major players in Jesus’ day were: Herod – the brutal son of the even more brutal Herod the Great – who rules in Galilee. Brother Philip – holds court over two lesser regions. Someone named Lysanias – is the governor of Abilene. These regions are the geographic areas in which most ordinary peasants of Jesus’ day – would have lived and moved.

In addition – they needed to know – that over the entire known, civilized world – that is – the ultimate realm of significance – the Roman Empire – reigned the Emperor Tiberius. They also would have known – that over the religious life of Israel – Annas and Caiaphas held preeminent power. These two high priests – presided over the Temple in Jerusalem – the center of the whole universe – according to ancient Jewish teaching.

So – Tiberius – Herod – Philip – Lysanias – Annas – and Caiaphas. These six – together with their wives – their children – **and** – as St. John the Baptist would later discover – their **lovers** – were the players – the movers and the shakers of that ancient world. Of course – **no one** had explained these important facts to Almighty God – in that year *Anno Domini* 26. God appears to be living out of the wrong frame of reference.

Each of these weighty leaders – had massive military and police presence throughout the region for enforcing official government policy. And it seems like God messed up. God selected – to carry the message – John the Baptist? Some guy who eats insects and wears clothes made out of camel’s hair? God chose – the desert wilderness – as the first forum – for issuing the Word of God?

Surely – Jerusalem – or Rome – would have provided far more extensive coverage and initial public exposure. But John the Baptist? In the desert where the scorpions and snakes were? It made no human sense. And not only did God pick

a poor point man to launch the Word of God campaign – as well as a sparsely populated and hostile desert venue. God also issued an upsetting press release – of rather harsh demands: repentance – Baptism – and personal agency.

That is what God wanted of Israel then. And it is what God wants from us now. God – you see – isn't about to excuse our sordid and messy human affairs on this planet. God isn't going to set aside our sins of omission and our sins of commission – on the plea – that we have not attended to **our own** life – because we've been **so consumed** with the lives – loves – labors – and laughs – of politicians and athletes.

My daughter Karrie used to say to church people who would try to tell her how to live and act as a pastor's kid: **“Get A Life! Get Real!”** Well, God gave us a life – a real life – and He is quite upset – that we've squandered it – by handing it over – to others.

God wants us to step up – and live our life. It's called: **personal agency – personal responsibility.** **I** am responsible – for **me!** **You** are responsible – for **you!** Only **you** – can live your life – in the company of the God who formed and fashioned you – in His own image. Only **you** can shut off the news – tune out the appeals of the stars and celebrities – and make haste for the River Jordan.

Only **you** can walk down into the waters – confess your sins – put your head in the hands of John the Baptist – and plunge beneath the running waters – of God's unending mercy. Only **you** – can get serious about living your life before the Savior God. And that is what the sacred season of **Advent** is all about.

Palaces are unworthy places – for announcing this Good News. Emperors and governors of this world – have no credibility – to call people to repentance. Celebrities and movie stars **cannot** wash us clean. We need **ascetics** – what the Church calls her spiritual athletes – we need **ascetics** – to hear our confession – cut our hair – bathe our bodies – lay balm on our sores – and feed our souls. We need Isaiah – Jeremiah – and Malachi – to turn our hearts to the Savior-God. We need St. John the Baptist to lead us to the Savior-God who redeemed us with His precious Blood. **We – need – Advent!**

If we know what is good for us – if we know what is good for us this Advent season – we will quit our office parties – forsake our politics – abandon our usual **secular cycle** of gift and drink to excess – and get ourselves down to the waters of repentance. If we are wise –this Advent season – we will turn off the repetitious

cacophony of Christmas carols – pick up a prophet – and bow low and read. In a word – we should begin to take our bodies – minds – wills – and souls – seriously. **God does. And so should we.**

“Get ready!” St. John the Baptist says to the Church today. “Tear down every obstacle between you and God – or God Himself will tear it down! Fill in every ditch between you and God – or God Himself will fill it in! Straighten the blind curves in your attitudes – and the twisting ways in your behavior toward others – or else God Himself will straighten you out. Get to work smoothing God’s way – because **He is surely coming home to you!**” Look to the perfect Lamb of God – to whom the Baptizer pointed – the perfect sacrifice – for all sin – for all time – for all people: Jesus the Christ of God.

This is the message of St. John the Baptist to the Church! This is the message of Advent for two thousand years! And this message lives: “Get ready! **Get real!** **Get A Life!** Amen.

The peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds + in Christ Jesus. Amen.

Soli Deo Gloria!